

# The world of

Edited by Heinz Bechert and Richard Gombrich

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# BUDDHISM

Buddhist Monks and Nuns in Society and Culture

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# The Buddha, His Teachings and His Sangha

ETIENNE LAMOTTE

THE BUDDHA IS ONE OF THOSE exceptional beings who see the truth, expound a doctrine and found a religious order. The Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha are the Three Jewels in which beings take refuge in order to find deliverance.

The Buddha is the great physician; the Dharma is the remedy; the Sangha is the nurse who administers the remedy. The foundation of a religious order is part of the work of the Buddhas: when the master attains complete Nirvāṇa, he can do nothing more for beings, and his Doctrine would not last long if there were no community to collect and perpetuate it.

## The Buddha

The last Buddha to appear in the world for the welfare and happiness of the many and to destroy suffering, disease, old age and death was named Śākyamuni.

According to unanimous tradition, Śākyamuni lived for eighty years, but the date of his Final Nirvāṇa, that is his decease, has still not been established with certainty. Nowadays, the Buddhists of Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Kampuchea and Laos place that Nirvāṇa in the year 543 BC. This date has, however, been rejected by the majority of Western and Indian historians, because the date of the Nirvāṇa is tied to that of the consecration of the Emperor Aśoka, an event which cross-checking with Greek sources enables us to place about 268–267 BC.

Two independent chronologies are used in the old documents: the 'long' chronology which places the Final Nirvāṇa 218 years before Aśoka's consecration, i.e. in 486 BC, and the 'short' chronology which locates

the same event 100 years before the consecration, i.e. in 368 BC.

For the sake of simplicity, I shall base myself here on the more generally adopted long chronology, although nowadays there is a tendency drastically to bring forward the date of the Buddha's Nirvāṇa.

The Buddha was born to the noble warrior Śuddhodana and the Princess Māyā, about the year 566 BC, in Kapilavastu, the main town in what is now the Nepalese Terai. He was a member of the Śākya tribe belonging to the Gautama clan. His forename was Siddhārtha ('Aim Attained'), but he was more commonly known as Gautama, or as Śākyamuni, 'the sage of the Śākya tribe'. His followers addressed him as Bhagavat, 'Lord' or 'Blessed One'. He usually referred to himself as Tathāgata, an enigmatic epithet meaning 'he who has gone [to the Truth] in the same way as his predecessors'. Until the night of his Enlightenment which was to make him a Buddha, Śākyamuni was only a bodhisattva, that is, a 'future Buddha'.

His youth passed in comfort and pleasure; he married at the age of sixteen, and his wife, Yaśodharā, bore him a son who received the name of Rāhula.

However, the great mysteries of an existence subject to old age, disease and death filled Śākyamuni with disgust for the world and, like many young people of his time, he resolved to win Immortality (*amṛta*). To his mind, this was not so much a question of eternal survival as of a definitive end to *saṃsāra*, the long series of existences which involve beings in suffering. In 537 BC, at the age of twenty-nine, he secretly left the town of Kapilavastu and adopted the life of a wandering religious mendicant (*parivrajaka*, *śramaṇa*).

Making his way southward, he reached the kingdom of Magadha (now southern Bihar) where King Bimbisāra was then reigning; he studied with two yoga masters and under their direction devoted himself to the practice of meditation and similar techniques which put him in contact with the higher spheres of existence, but these still did not guarantee him Immortality. Disappointed by the teachings of his masters, Śākyamuni decided to apply himself to the 'great effort'; he withdrew to Uruvilvā, where five mendicants came and joined him. For six years (537–532) he devoted himself to strict asceticism, with prolonged

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**The possessions permitted to a monk** were laid down by Śākyamuni himself. The earliest list consists of eight items. For monks outside India ('the middle country') the number was increased because of the cold climate. Some items from this larger list of thirteen items are illustrated in this stylized painting from the monastery of Samskar in Ladakh. There are shoes, rugs to sit on, two white towels, robes, a staff, an alms bowl and a filter for straining living organisms from drink in order to avoid taking life. Not shown, but also in this ancient list, are a razor, a needle and thread and a belt. Most modern monks use, of course, a much larger number of requisites in their daily life. (50)



*Śākyamuni as an ascetic, his body emaciated by the privations he underwent in the quest for Enlightenment – a stone sculpture from Gandhāra, 2nd century AD. After six years, convinced that such austerities served no purpose, he evolved the doctrine of the Middle Way.*

fasting and holding of the breath, which endangered his life. All these efforts were in vain, since such mortification did not even enable him to acquire psychic powers. He therefore gave them up; at which, his five companions left him and went to the Deer park in what is now Sārnāth, near Benares (Vārāṇasī).

Now alone, Śākyamuni was close to his triumph. A substantial meal and a bath in the river Nairāṇjanā restored his strength. In the evening, he went to Bodh-Gayā and sat down near a fig-tree (called a bodhi tree after his Enlightenment) in order to meditate. He directed his mind no longer towards the heavenly spheres and spheres beyond normal consciousness which his masters had taught him, but to the mysteries of death and rebirth in the world of appearances. During one memorable night (531 BC) he reached that Enlightenment (*bodhi*) which brings Buddhahood, Enlightenment of the higher degree (*abhisambodhi*), supreme and perfect Enlightenment (*anuttarā samyak-sambodhi*).

During the watches of that night, Śākyamuni won three knowledges: remembrance of his former lives, knowledge of the birth and death of beings, and the certainty of having finally cast off the ignorance and passion which until then had bound him to the world of becoming and led to successive rebirths. This threefold

knowledge brought with it perfect insight into the mechanism of Dependent Origination and Destruction (*pratītya-samutpāda*), the cycle of the causation of all the psycho-physical phenomena of life. The Buddha mentally examined, first forwards and then in reverse, the twelve causes (*nidāna*) or 'links' which condition that origination and destruction, and thus acquired the certainty of having himself escaped from the whirling wheel of rebirths and of living his very last life.

Having continued his meditations at Bodh-Gayā for four (or seven) weeks, the Buddha, enlightened and compassionate, conceived of a doctrine capable of opening the doors to Immortality, of putting an end to suffering and of ensuring peace, Nirvāṇa. This doctrine received the name of Dharma, 'Doctrine' or 'Law', a doctrine of deliverance, not of salvation by any external agency. It is profound, difficult to envisage and difficult to understand; it was not without hesitation, and only after the intervention of the great god Brahmā, that the Buddha decided to expound it. He went back to Benares, to the Deer Park. There, before the five mendicants who had witnessed his mortifications, he expounded his Discourse 'Turning the Wheel of the Doctrine' (*Dharmacakrapravartanasūtra*), in which are set out the Four Noble Truths (*āryasatya*) (see below), a discourse soon followed by a homily on the 'No-Self' (*anātman*) which proclaims the impersonality of all living phenomena of existence: there is no Self, nothing belongs to a Self.

The Discourses at Benares inaugurated the public ministry which the Buddha carried out for forty-five years (531–486). He travelled through the region of the middle Ganges in all directions, expounding the Doctrine, refuting his adversaries, making converts and recruiting those inclined into the religious order of monks (*bhikṣu*) which he had founded as one more of the many religious communities which existed at that time.

Worn out by age and fatigue, the Buddha resolved to relinquish his life forces and, leaving the town of Rājagṛha (Rajgir), by successive stages he reached the town of Kuśinagarī in the Malla country. An attack of dysentery compelled him to stop just outside the town, in the Upavarta Grove. There, lying between two trees, he went through a long series of meditative states and, 'like a flame which goes out through lack of fuel', reached the peace of complete Nirvāṇa. The Mallas of Kuśinagarī performed his cremation, and the neighbouring population shared out his relics, which they placed in commemorative monuments known as stupas.

The above historical sketch is not exactly identical with the mythical life of the Buddha as it is conceived by Buddhists. This myth is a biographical stereotype which, with a few minor differences, applies as well to the Buddhas who preceded him and to those who will follow him. The wonders and prodigies which, according to tradition, marked the events of his life from conception to cremation have been passed over in

silence here in order to present the biography in a more rational light. But it is not sufficient merely to discard the wondrous in order to reach historical truth. History cannot be based on legends. Moreover, my sketch makes no concessions to the Indian point of view, according to which beings are reborn for all eternity, assuming in turn hell-born, animal, human and divine forms; a complete biography, relating all the lives of a given individual, is therefore impossible. It could thus be objected that the sketch is only concerned with Śākyamuni's last life; it was then that he became a Buddha, but for that he first had to equip himself with knowledge and merit over a vast series of lives in human, animal and divine form. From this point of view, the story of Śākyamuni really began when, long long ago, he aroused the Thought of Enlightenment (*bodhicittotpāda*) and formed the resolve one day to attain supreme and perfect Enlightenment for the welfare and happiness of all beings. He then committed himself to the career of a bodhisattva (literally, Enlightenment-Being) – a future Buddha. This career, the stages of which were only fixed by later doctrine, was very long and stretched over at least three incalculable eons (*asamkhyeya kalpa*). During the first of these, Śākyamuni made the resolve to become a Buddha; at the end of the second, he communicated his decision to the Buddha Dīpaṃkara and the latter predicted success for him; during the third, he was assured of never slipping back; finally, for another ninety-one shorter eons, he performed meritorious actions which were to earn him the thirty-two physical marks of a Great Man which characterize both universal monarchs and fully and perfectly Enlightened Buddhas.

For Buddhists no being has any enduring essence or personality; all, the Buddha included, exist in name only. What receives that name is merely an assemblage of *skandhas*, 'Aggregates' or 'groups of psycho-physical elements' which arise and perish from instant to instant, carried along for all eternity on the whirling wheel of lives. Contrary to what is asserted by the Brahmins, the Self conceived as a permanent, stable, eternal and unchanging entity does not exist anywhere; there is no Self and nothing belongs to a Self.

Thus Śākyamuni, like all other beings, throughout time (for time has no beginning) was constantly reborn into the triple world (the earth, the heavens above and the hells beneath) in the form of a series of five Aggregates: form or corporeality; feeling; perceptions; volitions; consciousness. These Aggregates are impure (*sāsrava*) in that they are defiled by passion and ignorance, which bind them to the triple world. After becoming a bodhisattva, Śākyamuni progressed in morality, concentration and wisdom, aiming both for the deliverance which would free him from the world of existences and for the omniscience which would make him a Buddha. Through the practice of the perfections (*pāramitā*), especially generosity, he developed within himself elements of holiness which correlated with the

five impure Aggregates constituting his 'false' personality. These elements of holiness, called pure (*anāsrava*) *skandhas* or Aggregates, are five in number: morality (*śīla*), mental concentration (*samādhi*), wisdom (*prajñā*), deliverance (*vimukti*), and the knowledge and vision of deliverance (*vimukti-jñāna-darśana*). The bodhisattva gradually perfects them but does not yet possess them in their fullness.

After his Enlightenment, Śākyamuni was still a man, because the five impure Aggregates, fruits of his previous actions, persisted in him, but he was also a Holy One (*arhat*) and a fully Enlightened Buddha (*samyaksambuddha*). He was a Holy One in that he was freed from the impurities: he was possessed in full of the five pure Aggregates which culminated in conscious deliverance. Many were to be the disciples who, after him, reached that same deliverance and, in this sense at least, were the equals of their master since 'between one deliverance and another, there is no difference (*M. II, 129; S. V, 410; A. III, 34*).<sup>\*</sup> All the same, the Enlightenment (*bodhi*) which they reached does not equal the full and perfect Enlightenment (*anuttarā samyaksambodhi*) of the Buddhas.

If Śākyamuni was fully and perfectly Enlightened, he owed this to the knowledge (*jñāna*) and merit (*punya*) he had accumulated for incalculable eons. At the moment of his Enlightenment, that merit was transformed into the corresponding attributes of a Buddha, especially omniscience (*sarvajñatā*) and great compassion (*mahākaruṇā*). His omniscience knows the particular and general characteristics of all things; his great compassion extends to all beings and seeks to free them from *samsāra*. In fact, if three things, birth, old age and death, were not to exist, the Tathāgata would not appear in the world; since, however, they do exist, he manifests himself in it (*A. V, 144; NidSa. 205*).

When shortly after his Enlightenment, Śākyamuni was going to Benares, he met the ascetic Upaka on the way and said to him: 'There is no master for me, no one is comparable to me; in this world I am the only fully Enlightened One; I have attained perfect and supreme Enlightenment; in this world I have overcome all and am omniscient; here, I am defiled by nothing. Having abandoned everything and being free from desire, I am delivered; having reached Enlightenment by myself, whom could I call master? None is like me, I have no equal; by instructing myself, I have attained Enlightenment. I am the Tathāgata, the teacher of gods and men, omniscient and endowed with all powers. In this world I am the Holy One; in the worlds of gods and men, none surpasses me; in those worlds with all their gods I have vanquished Māra, I am the conqueror. ... Like me, those who have attained the destruction of the impurities are conquerors; I have conquered evil things; that is why I am the conqueror' (*Sanghabh. I, 132; C.P.S. 128, 443; Vin. I, 8; etc.*).

<sup>\*</sup> A list of abbreviations of the titles of texts quoted in this chapter appears on p. 58.

Śākyamuni devoted forty-five years of his last life to expounding the Doctrine, founding a community of religious mendicants (*bhikṣu*) and a fellowship of devoted lay people. Having accomplished his Buddha work, he attained complete Nirvāṇa (*parinirvāṇa*), Nirvāṇa without a remainder of conditioning (*nirupādhīṣeṣa nirvāṇa*). The five Aggregates which constituted his false personality disappeared without a trace: 'Just as all the mangoes attached to a stem bearing a bunch of mangoes undergo the fate of that stem if it is broken, so the body of the Tathāgata has broken what leads to existence. As long as his body lasts, gods and men will see him. On the breaking up of the body, at the end of his life, gods and men will see him no more' (*D. I*, 46). 'Just as the flame touched by the wind goes towards stillness, goes from sight, so the sage delivered from his names and bodies [or the five impure Aggregates] enters stillness, goes from the sight of all. . . . He who has attained stillness, no measure can measure, to speak of him there are no words. What the mind might conceive vanishes. Thus every path is closed to discussion' (*Su.*, verses 1074–6). At the moment of the Final Nirvāṇa of the Buddhas or of their great disciples, the series of the five pure Aggregates which were the cause of their holiness also disappear.

Thus when the Buddhas have left the world of becoming, the pure and impure elements which constituted their personalities disappear without a trace and are nowhere to be found. So it is for the Holy Ones. When the noble Godhika, who had attained the summit of perfection, stabbed himself and entered complete Nirvāṇa, a veil of smoke and darkness spread in the ten

directions: it was Māra, the Malign One who rules over the world of desire, who had gone off in search of Godhika's consciousness; but he did not find it anywhere, for the Holy One was in complete Nirvāṇa and his consciousness had found no place (*S. I*, 121–2).

What then remains of a Buddha in Final Nirvāṇa? A corpse, a few relics with which the monks were not to be unduly concerned. To Ānanda, his attendant monk, who asked him what to do with the body of the Perfect One, the master replied: 'Do not waste your time, O Ānanda, in paying homage to my body; but concern yourself, with all diligence and application, with your own spiritual welfare. There are, O Ānanda, among the nobles, Brahmins and householders, wise men who believe in the Perfect One; they will pay homage to the body of the Perfect One' (*D. II*, 141).

The Buddha held his body in low esteem even though it was adorned with the thirty-two marks of a Great Man and surrounded by a brilliance a span in width. His disciple Vatkali was too attached to him and, worn out by his constant attentions, his master sent him away with these words: 'What good to you is this body of filth? He who sees the Dharma sees me.' (*S. III*, 120.)

The Dharma, that is, the Doctrine, is the only heritage the Buddha left to his disciples: 'Have the Dharma as an island', he said to them. 'Have the Dharma as your refuge and seek no other help' (*D. II*, 100–1). But, as we have seen, the Buddha did not merely expound a doctrine; he also founded a religious order, the Sangha, comprising four assemblies: monks (*bhikṣu*), nuns (*bhikṣumī*), laymen (*upāsaka*) and laywomen (*upāsikā*).



In this 2nd-century AD relief from Amarāvati, India, the central stupa stands for the Buddha's Final Nirvāṇa; two intertwined snakes (*nagas*, or serpent divinities) are coiled round the dome, and

the umbrellas on either side are signs of honour. The elephants kneel in worship; they commonly symbolize royalty or supremacy and are a conventional sign of good fortune.

A community does not appear out of nothing, outside a setting in time and place; the Buddhist monastic Order came into being as part of an established category of Indian religious renunciates who were not strictly recluses, but rather wanderers and mendicant monks. The Buddha and his disciples were aware of belonging to a wider Indian religious world and had no hesitation in claiming its titles inasmuch as they devoted themselves to the practice of higher morality, higher thought (concentration) and higher wisdom. In the Buddhist Doctrine and Discipline there are a large number of tenets and institutions which have parallels in Hinduism and Brahminism. This by no means implies that the Buddha and his disciples swallowed them whole: they evaluated them for their true worth and made a judicious selection. The Buddha declared: 'It is not I who argue with the world, it is the world that argues with me. What is accepted in the world of the wise, I adopt' (*S. III*, 138).

Buddhism met with rivals among the Brahmins and religious of the time and, on occasion, did not spare them from criticism. If it triumphed over them, this was due less to polemics than to the quality of its doctrines and practices. The Buddha limited his teaching to what would lead to calming, knowledge, Enlightenment, Nirvāṇa. All the rest is but speculation which he refused to discuss, because it did not contribute to deliverance.

Another quality conducive to the success of the Dharma was the rejection of extreme positions. The Buddha condemned both a life given over to pleasure and a life of austerity as unworthy and useless (*Vin. I*, 10). On points of doctrine which were not directly concerned with deliverance, he kept to the middle way, at an equal distance between realism and nihilism (*S. II*, 17, 21–24).

Moreover, the Good Doctrine is tolerant. The disciple who has entered the Path to Nirvāṇa is not expected to renounce the beliefs and practices inherited from his environment. While it is true that the traditional rites (*śīlavrata*) have no great efficacy, they are not absolutely forbidden. Whatever their origin, the Hindu, Vedic and Brahminic deities (Maheśvara, Brahmā, Indra, the four Divine Kings, etc.), the countless throng of demi-gods (*Devas*, *Nāgas*, *Yakṣas*, *Gandharvas*, *Asuras*, *Garuḍas*, *Kiṃnaras*, *Mahoragas*, *Kumbhāṇḍas*), not to mention the divinities of trees, water and jungle, all have their place in Buddhist mythology and play an important part in the life of the Buddha himself. None of them, however, accede to the rank of an eternal, stable and unchanging god, since they are subject to the vicissitudes of rebirth. Nevertheless, they have a right to respect and consideration: they honour those who honour them and they esteem those who esteem them (*Vin. I*, 229).

### The Dharma

The Buddha's Word is good in the beginning, in the middle and at the end, perfect in meaning and letter,

homogeneous, complete and pure (*Vin. I*, 35, 242; *D. I*, 62; *M. I*, 179). From the night of the Enlightenment until the night of the Final Nirvāṇa, all that the Buddha uttered and taught is true (*D. III*, 135; *A. II*, 24; *It.* 121). The sky will fall with the moon and stars, the earth will rise up into the heavens with the mountains and forests, the oceans will dry up, but the great sages say nothing untruthful (*Divy.* 268, 272). The Good Word of the Buddhas is distinguished by four characteristics: it is well spoken; it is agreeable and pleasant; it is in conformity with welfare; it is truthful (*Sn.* 78).

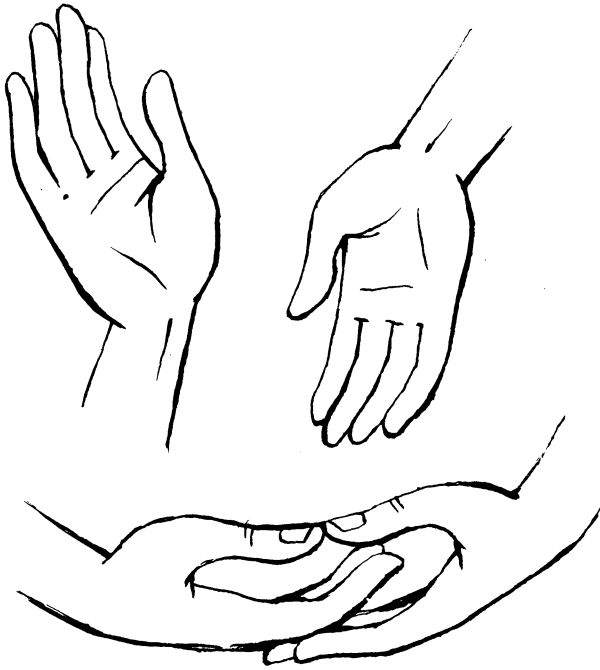
The Buddha honoured the Dharma he had discovered. A few weeks after his Enlightenment, when he was meditating under the goatherd's banyan tree, Śākyamuni sought to discover an ascetic or Brahmin in the world whom he could revere and serve. Finding no one superior to himself, he resolved to devote himself to the Dharma which he had himself discovered in order to honour, respect and serve it (*S. I*, 138–40).

The Doctrine of Dependent Origination, the norm governing the arising and passing away of all phenomena, constitutes the leading theme of the Dharma. It is discovered and taught from age to age by the Buddhas, but it was not created either by the Buddhas or by anyone else (*Nid.Sa.* 164) and, whether or not the Buddhas appear in the world, it remains constant and invariable (*S. II*, 25; *A. I*, 286).

He who sees Dependent Origination sees the Dharma, and he who sees the Dharma sees Dependent Origination (*M. I*, 190–1). The law of causality – the chain of causes and effects – is something difficult for humanity to grasp. Equally difficult to grasp is the attainment of peace of all compounded things, the detachment from earthly things, the extinction of covetousness, the cessation of desire, the end, Nirvāṇa (*Vin. I*, 5). Fearing his efforts might be useless, Śākyamuni hesitated to expound the Dharma but, yielding to the request of the god Brahmā, he went to Benares and 'set turning the wheel of the Doctrine'.

The Buddha put forward his Teaching, but did not impose it as a truth requiring the assent of faith. Undoubtedly, in order to be able to receive it one must be to a certain degree well disposed, but a mere act of faith is not enough to bring about true conversion. The Truth is only emancipatory to the degree that it is based on spontaneous conviction. Although the whole of Śākyamuni's biography is imbued with marvels, the master never had recourse to miracles in order to demonstrate the cogency of his teachings. He abhorred and execrated wonders which had no conclusive value (*D. I*, 213). He condemned as vulgar and unworthy the hundreds of forms of charlatanism by which ascetics and Brahmins of his time made their living (*D. I*, 9–12); he excommunicated certain monks who falsely claimed psychic powers (*Vin. III*, 92); he severely reprimanded one of his disciples who, for a trifling reason, had risen into the air and walked above the crowd, for that, he said, was the conduct of a courtesan exhibiting herself for a few coins (*Vin. II*, 112). Śākyamuni sought a





*Buddhism took over from Hinduism a complex vocabulary of hand-gestures ('mudrās') to symbolize spiritual ideas. The selection shown here is taken from a Tibetan source; preaching (open hand upright); generosity (open hand pointing downwards); and meditation (hands folded on lap).*

spontaneous conviction from his monks on certain points of doctrine:

'And now, monks, that you know and think thus, are you going to say, "We honour the master and through respect for the master, we say this or that"?'

'We shall not say it, Lord.'

'What you assert, is that not what you have yourself acknowledged, you yourselves seen, you yourselves grasped?'

'That is just so, Lord.' (M. I, 265).

The Dharma, which the Buddhas penetrate so perfectly in depth and detail that they hardly differ from it, is independent of time (*akālika*), and is communicated to mankind by the Buddhas from age to age and by various means. The Buddhas are alike in knowledge, might, bodily perfection and the services they render beings, but they differ in life-span, caste and clan, bodily dimensions, the length of duration of the Doctrine they promulgate, etc. Śākyamuni, for instance, lived for eighty years, was of the Kṣatriya caste and the Gautama clan, and he prophesied that his Doctrine would last only for a thousand years.

It might be expected that the Omniscient One would teach us everything, but it was not so. He was not unaware of the great problems which disturb the human mind, or of the solutions proposed by the

ascetics and Brahmins. Is the world of beings transitory or eternal, finite or infinite? Is the life-principle the same as the body or different from it? Does the Holy One exist after death? Śākyamuni refused to express an opinion on these questions, because the knowledge of such things does not lead to any progress on the paths to holiness, because it does not lead to peace or to Enlightenment (M. I, 430-1). These problems, forever discussed by pundits, provoke endless arguments. Śākyamuni did not take part in such discussions. The true reason for the Buddha's silence is that the problems in question are wrongly put; to answer them in the affirmative or the negative is to fall within the extreme views of eternalism or nihilism. On this matter, Śākyamuni took a middle way, at an equal distance between affirmation and negation, and he recommended his disciples to do the same: 'Consider as undeclared that which I have not declared; consider as declared that which I have declared' (M. I, 431).

The Buddha did not teach everything to his disciples and did not pretend that he had. One day, when he was staying in Kauśāmbī in the Śimśapā Wood, he took some *śimśapā* leaves in his hands and said to the monks:

'What do you think? Which are more numerous, these leaves or the leaves of all the trees in the wood?'

'Few are the leaves the Lord holds in his hands; very numerous are the leaves of all the trees in the wood.'

'Similarly, O monks, much have I learnt; very little have I taught you. Nevertheless, I have not acted like those teachers who close their fists and keep their secrets to themselves; for I have taught you the Four Truths. That is what is useful; those are the principles of the religious life; that is what leads to disgust, renunciation, destruction, stilling, peace, superknowledge, perfect Enlightenment, Nirvāṇa. That is why I have taught it.' (S. V, 437-8)

The Word of the Buddha has only one flavour (*rasa*): that of deliverance. Its aim and effect is to end universal suffering (*Vin.* II, 239; *A.* IV, 203; *Ud.* 56). It is not, properly speaking, an encyclopaedia of religious knowledge but a way of deliverance discovered and proposed by the Buddha. His teaching is public, not secret (*A.* I, 283); he addressed all beings without distinction and showed them the Path to Nirvāṇa. Nevertheless, it did not depend on him to make the traveller follow his indications. He was merely 'he who points the Way' (*mārgākhyāyin*), the Path to follow in order to reach the goal (M. III, 6).

Invariable in essence, the Dharma varies in its expression. In his great compassion, Śākyamuni adjusted his Teaching according to whether he was concerned with a non-believer, a lay person, or a monk. The truth cannot be presented to everyone at the same time and in the same terms; it needs to be communicated with care if it is to suit an astute person capable of assimilating it; it can be harmful to an ignorant person incapable for the moment of grasping it. Some of the Buddha's hearers could understand his Teaching; others did not even hear his voice. Śākyamuni was the

good sower who spread the seed in different ways depending on whether he was sowing a field of higher, middling or poor quality (*S. IV*, 315). He multiplied skilful means in order to lead beings to deliverance; through their flexibility and variety, his teachings sometimes pose awkward problems for exegetes, but they are all marked by his great compassion. It even happened that he seemingly contradicted himself. Phālguna, who believed in the existence of a soul and personality, asked: 'What is the being that touches, feels, desires and grasps?' The Buddha replied: 'I deny that there is any being that touches, feels, desires and grasps.' Conversely, when Vatsagotra, who no longer believed in the existence of a soul, asked whether it were true that the Self did not exist, the Buddha refused to answer in the negative, 'in order not to confirm the doctrine of the ascetics and Brahmins who believe in annihilation' (*S. II*, 13; *IV*, 400).

Manifold in its unity, unique in its manifoldness, the Dharma is a doctrinal code in which are set out truths which the Buddha did not originate, but of which he had a pure knowledge and which he transmitted to his disciples. Śākyamuni's fleshly body (*māmsakāya*), adorned with the thirty-two marks and surrounded by pure brilliance, is not longer visible to gods and men, and it would be useless to look for it anywhere: it is not his essential body. The Dharma which he expounded and which, by the most various of means, guides beings towards deliverance is, metaphorically speaking, the true body of the Buddhas, for it is independent of time. If its brilliance is sometimes obscured, this is due to man's incomprehension; the truth itself undergoes no eclipse. The sun shines in daytime; the moon at night; fire shines day and night, but sometimes here and sometimes there; among all lights the Buddha is the incomparable light (*S. I*, 15).

Consequently, without denying the historicity of the Buddha Śākyamuni, one should see him above all as a light and a guide. His adherents commemorate him by saying: 'Indeed, that Blessed One is worthy of homage, fully and perfectly enlightened, endowed with knowledge and practice, well-come, knower of the world, supreme leader of men – those beings to be tamed – teacher of gods and men, the Enlightened One, the Blessed One' (*A. III*, 285).

### The content of the Buddha's Teaching

The Dharma, that is, the Buddhist Doctrine, is condensed in the Four Noble Truths (*āryasatya*) expounded by the Buddhas, and especially by Śākyamuni in his Discourse at Benares (*Vin. I*, 10; *Sanghabh. I*, 137–8):

- (i) Everything is suffering (*duḥkha*).
- (ii) The origin of suffering (*duḥkhasamudaya*) is desire (*trṣṇā*).
- (iii) There exists a Nirvāṇa, an end to suffering (*duḥkhanirodha*).
- (iv) A Path, defined by the Buddha, leads to Nirvāṇa.

### 'Everything is suffering'

Everything is suffering, in the sense that the psycho-physical phenomena of existence are suffering and the existences in which these phenomena develop are themselves suffering. By examining a man in an empirical and immediate way, there can be noted in him five categories of phenomena which are basically distinct but so closely united that the categories are called Aggregates (*skandhas*). They are:

(i) Form or corporeality (*rūpa*), made up of the four great elements (earth, water, fire, wind) or a subtle matter derived from those four elements.

(ii) Feeling (*vedanā*), which can be pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. Feelings result from contact between six internal organs (*indriya*) and six external objects (*viṣaya*) which together form the twelve Bases of Consciousness (*āyatana*):

| Internal organs | External objects |
|-----------------|------------------|
| 1 Eye           | 7 Sight          |
| 2 Ear           | 8 Sound          |
| 3 Nose          | 9 Odour          |
| 4 Tongue        | 10 Taste         |
| 5 Body          | 11 Touch         |
| 6 Mind          | 12 Mental object |

The first five organs each have their own object: the eye is concerned with sight, the ear with sounds, etc.; the mind (*manas*) is concerned with not only its own object, namely, mental objects (*dharma*), but also the objects of the first five organs.

(iii) Perception (*samjñā*), related to the six external objects.

(iv) Volition (*samskāra*), the reaction of the will to the six objects.

(v) Consciousness (*viññāna*), which grasps the characteristics of the six objects. There are six kinds of consciousness which are added to the twelve Bases of Consciousness and are called Elements (*dhātu*):

- 13 Visual consciousness
- 14 Auditory consciousness
- 15 Olfactory consciousness
- 16 Gustatory consciousness
- 17 Tactile consciousness
- 18 Mental consciousness

So the whole field of living experience can be defined in the terms of the five Aggregates (*skandha*) or of the twelve Bases of Consciousness (*āyatana*) or of the eighteen Elements (*dhātu*). These three classifications, which are interchangeable, appear in the early canonical sources, but the first is the most widespread. Other classifications were added later.

The five Aggregates, inasmuch as they arise from causes and conditions, are conditioned things (*samskṛta dharma*), also referred to as 'Formations' (*samskāra*). They are endowed with the three or four characteristics of conditioned things (*samskṛta lakṣaṇa*) – arising (*utpāda*), disappearance (*vyaya*), duration-and-change (*sthitī-anyathātva*) – by the terms of which they arise, endure and disappear (*A. I*, 152; *S. III*, 37; *NidSa.* 139).

Each Formation (*saṃskāra*) has its own essential nature (*svabhāva*) or particular characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*), but all are marked by the seal of impermanence, suffering and impersonality (*M. I, 138–9; S. II, 244–6; M. III, 271–3*):

‘What do you think, O monks – are the Aggregates, Bases of Consciousness and Elements permanent (*nitya*) or impermanent (*anitya*)?’

‘Impermanent, Lord.’

‘But that which is impermanent, is it suffering (*duḥkha*) or happiness (*sukha*)?’

‘Suffering, Lord.’

‘So, therefore, of what is impermanent, suffering and subject to change, can it be said, when this is considered: That is mine, I am that, that is my Self?’

‘It cannot, Lord.’

The Formations are seen as follows:

(i) They are transitory because they arise and perish in a perpetual changing. Subject to birth, disease, old age and death, the body changes from instant to instant. Feelings, perceptions and volitions follow each other and do not resemble each other. As for the mind or consciousness, it appears and disappears in a perpetual changing, day and night, like a monkey gambolling in a forest and leaping from branch to branch (*S. II, 94–5*).

Let us suppose the Ganges sweeps along a mass of foam and that a man with keen sight perceives, observes and attentively examines it. He will find that the ball of foam is empty and insubstantial, with no real essence. In the same way, if it is observed, corporeality will be seen to be empty and insubstantial, with no real essence, and it is the same with the other four Aggregates: ‘Form is like a ball of foam, feeling is like a bubble of water, perception is like a mirage, volition is like the trunk of a banana tree [i.e. without a core, like an onion] and consciousness is like a ghost’ (*S. III, 140–2*). It is undeniable that all that is subject to arising is also subject to destruction (*S. IV, 47*).

(ii) The Formations are suffering precisely because they are transitory. Three principles of suffering exist: suffering in itself (*duḥkha-duḥkhatā*), experienced as such; suffering resulting from the fact of being conditioned (*saṃskāraduḥkhatā*); and suffering arising from change (*vipariṇāmaduḥkhatā*) (*D. III, 216; S. IV, 259*). All that is felt is felt in suffering (*S. IV, 216*); nothing arises but suffering and nothing is destroyed but suffering (*S. I, 135*).

If all the psycho-physical phenomena of existence – Aggregates, Bases of Consciousness and Elements – are stamped by impermanence and marked by suffering, it follows that the various forms of rebirth and the world in which they develop share the same defects.

*Samṣāra*, or the round of rebirths, continues for all eternity: ‘It is impossible to discover a beginning from which beings, led astray by ignorance, fettered by the thirst for existence, wander aimlessly from birth to birth’ (*S. II, 179*). According to the Buddhist conception, the roots of which reach into ancient Indian traditions, *saṃsāra* occurs throughout the

five forms of rebirth (*pañcagati*) and the Triple World (*traiḍhātuka*).

The five forms of rebirth are those of the hell-born, animals, ghosts (*preta*), mankind and gods. The first three are qualified as bad, and the last two as good (*M. I, 73*). In the first three there is more suffering than happiness; in the human, the two are balanced; in the divine, happiness transcends suffering. However, whatever blisses may be in store for them, all existences are basically suffering because they are transitory, and happiness destined to disappear is suffering. Vitiating by impermanence, existences are merely an infinitesimal point in the long series of suffering: ‘While, on this long journey, you wander aimlessly from birth to birth, there have been more tears shed for you than there is water in the four oceans’ (*S. II, 180*).

The five forms of rebirth are spread throughout a receptacle-world called the Triple World. It consists of:

(a) The world of desire (*kāmadhātu*), in which beings enjoy the five sense-objects (colours, sounds, odours, tastes and tangible objects). This world of desire includes the rebirths of the hell-born, animals, ghosts and mankind, plus some of the gods, namely, the six classes of lesser gods who are still subject to sense-pleasure.

(b) The world of form (*rūpadhātu*), inhabited by the seventeen classes of Brahmā gods, who are endowed with subtle form, detached from sense-pleasure but experiencing the joyful effects of the four meditative absorptions in which they dwell.

(c) The formless world (*ārūpyadhātu*), appertaining to the higher gods, who are formless, exist in the shape of ‘pure mentality’ and are plunged in the blisses of the four formless attainments (*samāpatti*) in which they contemplate the infinity of space, the infinity of consciousness, the infinity of nothingness and the summit of existence (*bhavāgra*), a psychic sphere transcending the limits of consciousness.

(iii) Transitory and painful, the Formations are not a Self and do not belong to a Self. Buddhism is the doctrine of the No-Self (*anātmavāda*) and is thus the reverse of Brahminism and Hinduism, which believe in the existence of a permanent, stable, eternal and unchanging Self.

The Buddha explained that the five Aggregates are not the Self because if corporeality, feeling, perception, volition and consciousness were the Self, they would not be subject to disease, and they could be controlled at will – in the case of corporeality for instance by saying: ‘May my body be so, may my body not be so’ (*Vin. I, 13; S. III, 66–8*), and so on.

Since the Self and what belongs to the Self do not exist in truth or with certainty, is it not sheer folly to claim: ‘The world of the Aggregates is my Self; after my death, I will be permanent, stable, eternal and unchanging’ (*M. I, 138*)?

Led astray by a belief in a personality (*satkāyadr̥ṣṭi*), the ignorant ordinary man considers bodily form as the Self, the Self as possessing form, form as present in the

*After his Enlightenment the Buddha, with those followers who had witnessed his mortifications, went to a Deer Park near Benares and preached his first sermon, in which he announced his discovery of the Four Noble Truths and expounded his doctrine of deliverance. His discourse became known as 'Turning the Wheel of the Doctrine' and is one of the most frequently represented scenes in Buddhist art. This relief is from Ali Masj'd, in what is now Afghanistan. The two deer at the bottom allude to the Deer Park.*



Self, and the Self as present in form. And he does the same with the other four Aggregates (M. I, 300; III, 17). The ordinary man thus nourishes four misconceptions concerning each of the five Aggregates, so the belief in a personality is compared to a twenty-peaked mountain chain.

It should be admitted that the belief in a personality is not a defiled view in the sense that it is not directly a cause of wrong-doing and hell. In fact, the man who believes in the Self wishes for happiness after death and, in this belief, practises giving, observes morality: all good actions ensuring rebirth in the world of mankind or in heaven.

However, the belief in an 'I' is incompatible with Buddhist spiritual life, the uprooting of desire and the reaching of Nirvāṇa. Taking a tiny ball of dung between his fingers, the Buddha said to a monk: 'The belief in the existence of a permanent, stable, eternal and unchanging Self, be it as tiny as this ball of dung, would ruin the religious life which culminates in the perfect destruction of suffering' (S. III, 144); he also said: 'With regard to this, I see no adhesion to that view which would not engender in him who adheres to it grief, lamentation, suffering, anguish and despair' (M. I, 137-8).

In popular language, which the Buddha himself did not hesitate to use, the terms 'being', 'man', 'person' or 'self' (*ātman*) are used. These are mere labels for convenient reference to a complex of conditioned,

impermanent, suffering and impersonal phenomena. Just as when the parts of a chariot, once assembled, are called 'chariot', in the same way, wherever the five Aggregates are to be found, it is usual to speak of a 'being' (S. I, 135). In truth, no so-called soul or spirit, no Tathāgata, is any of the five Aggregates, can be found in them or elsewhere, or is an assemblage of the five Aggregates and yet separate from them. Therefore, even in the present life, the Tathāgata is not acknowledged as a real being (S. III, 111-2; IV, 383-4).

An objection naturally comes to mind: how can early Buddhism, which denies the existence of a transmigrating entity, affirm the reality of rebirth? The answer is simple. What passes from existence to existence is not a permanent, stable, eternal and unchanging soul (which is nowhere to be found), but a series of five transitory, suffering and impersonal Aggregates, ever subject to change and rebirth.

The Truth of suffering affirms the reality of the Aggregates alone (*skandhamātravāda*) and rejects the Self (*nairātmyavāda*). It is a series of psycho-physical phenomena, real but impermanent, which passes from existence to existence during the long night of *samsāra*, but those phenomena are not a Self and do not belong to a Self. 'The world is empty (*sūnya*) of a Self and anything belonging to a Self' (S. IV, 54). Here appears for the first time the notion of 'Emptiness' (*sūnyatā*) to which Buddhist thinkers have always been drawn and which was to be taken to great lengths.

*'The origin of suffering is desire'*

The phenomena of existence, the Aggregates, Bases of Consciousness and Elements, are transitory, suffering and empty of a Self or anything belonging to a Self, but they do not occur by chance; they originate in desire (*trṣṇā*). Their appearance and disappearance are ruled by Dependent Origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), by virtue of which arising (*utpatti*) is due to action (*karman*) and action is due to passion (*kleśa*).

*Samsāra*, which has no beginning, is like an infinite sequence of existences. From this series, let us take at random a group of three rebirths, respectively past, present and future, and examine how the five Aggregates appear in them. We note that they are subject to the mechanism of the twelvefold Dependent Origination, each 'fold' or link of which is the cause, or more exactly, the condition of the next. This interdependence is traditionally indicated in the following way: 'This being, that is; from the arising of this, that arises; and conversely, this not being, that is not; from the destruction of this, that is destroyed' (S. II, 28; C.P.S. 102-4).

Each of the twelve links is a complex of five Aggregates, but it takes its name from the most important phenomenon (*dharma*). All of them, including ignorance, which starts the list, are of equal importance: impermanent, conditioned and dependently arising, they are doomed to destruction, disappearance, detachment and suppression (S. II, 26).

The formula of Dependent Origination is as follows (S. II, 2-4). Through (1) ignorance (*avidyā*) are conditioned the (2) Kārmic Formations (*samskāra*), i.e. rebirth-producing volitions; through the Karmic Formations is conditioned (3) consciousness (*viññāna*); through consciousness are conditioned (4) name and form (*nāmarūpa*), i.e. mental and physical phenomena; through name and form are conditioned the (5) six Bases of Consciousness (*ṣaḍāyatana*), which have already been explained; through the six Bases of Consciousness is conditioned (6) contact (*sparsa*), i.e. contact between the internal organs and external objects which leads to the six kinds of consciousness; through contact is conditioned (7) feeling (*vedanā*); through feeling is conditioned (8) thirst, or desire (*trṣṇā*), i.e. an impassioned reaction to what has been felt; through thirst is conditioned (9) clinging (*upādāna*), or attachment to the five Aggregates; through clinging is conditioned (10) becoming (*bhava*), or action which produces rebirth; through becoming is conditioned (11) birth (*jāti*), the appearance of the five Aggregates and internal organs; through birth is conditioned (12) old-age-and-death (*jarā-maraṇa*).

These twelve links describe the Dependent Origination of the five Aggregates in the course of three successive existences: ignorance and the Karmic Formations occur in the past existence; eight links, from consciousness to becoming, occur in the present existence; and birth, old-age-and-death in the future one. Taken forwards this explains the arising of the

phenomena of existence; in reverse, their destruction.

The links involve a process of activity (*karmabhava*) and a process of birth (*utpattibhava*); they are therefore both cause and result. Moreover, ignorance, thirst and clinging are passions (*kleśa*); Karmic Formations and becoming are actions (*karman*); and the links from consciousness to feeling inclusive, birth, old-age-and-death are results (*vipākaphala*) or birth (*janman*), in that they continue existence in *samsāra*. This shows that the wheel of life has no beginning: passions and actions lead to birth which leads to passions and actions which lead to birth, and so on. However, 'everything that is subject to arising is also subject to destruction'.

In simple terms, the system of Dependent Origination comes down to three things: (i) passion, (ii) action and (iii) result; passion vitiates action and action causes a retributive result.

(i) Passion, also designated ignorance (*avidyā*), thirst (*trṣṇā*) and clinging (*upādāna*), is a mental state composed of delusion and desire. The word thirst is taken here in its widest meaning: (1) the thirst for sense pleasures (*kāmatrṣṇā*) – the desire which awakens and takes root in the presence of agreeable and pleasant objects; (2) the thirst for existence (*bhavatrṣṇā*) and, especially, for existences in the higher worlds, i.e. the world of form and the formless world; (3) the thirst for annihilation (*vibhavatrṣṇā*), from the point of view of the belief that everything ends at death (*Vin.* I, 10). Desire, with all the delusions it presupposes, is a fetter (*samyojana*) which is difficult to break. It is pernicious to delight in sense-pleasures and even more pernicious to nurture in oneself an impossible ideal of eternal survival or total annihilation.

Passion vitiates action by means of the threefold poison of craving (*rāga*), hatred (*dveṣa*) and delusion (*moha*): 'There are three causes of the origin of actions: craving, hatred and delusion' (A. I, 263). 'Consumed by craving, enraged by hatred, blinded by delusion, overwhelmed and despairing, man contemplates his own downfall, that of others, and both together' (A. I, 156-7).

(ii) Action (*karman*) is a volition (*cetanā*) which is translated into bodily, vocal and mental acts (A. III, 415). Some Indian thinkers have considered action to be a material substance, a virus infecting the organism. Buddhism's great step was to place action in the mind, and this new position conditioned and determined the whole development of Buddhist philosophy. Action is only truly action, only of any significance, if it is conscious, reflected on and willed. Action is strictly personal and incommunicable. Actions are the property of beings, their inheritance, their formative mould, their kin and their refuge (M. III, 203). Man is the inheritor of the actions he carries out (A. III, 186). 'This bad action which is yours was not done by your mother or your father or by anyone else. You alone have done this bad action, you alone will reap its fruit' (M. III, 181).

In fact, action separates beings by distributing them

According to Buddhist doctrine, life is vitiated by three things: craving, hatred and delusion. They are represented in the centre of a Tibetan tanka by the cock, the snake and the pig (see also p. 29, pl. 24). The Buddha laid great stress on individual moral responsibility: 'This bad action which is yours was not done by your mother or your father or by anyone else. You alone have done this bad action, you alone will reap its fruit.' Only by overcoming craving, hatred, and delusion can one achieve Enlightenment.



throughout the different good and bad forms of rebirth (M. III, 203).

(iii) Ripening or fruition (*vipāka*) of actions takes place exclusively in the Aggregates, which are reborn throughout the destinies in *saṃsāra*: 'Done (*kṛta*) and accumulated (*upacita*) actions do not ripen in earth or in water or in fire or in wind but in the phenomena of existence – Aggregates, Bases of Consciousness and Elements – which their enactor has acquired (*Saṅgabbh.* II, 1–2). Since the Aggregates are suffering, and since the *saṃsāra* in which they develop is suffering, all the fruits of actions are suffering.

Whether its consequences are pleasant or unpleasant, all action is deleterious in as much as it prolongs the long sequence of *saṃsāra*. The only way to interrupt the series of rebirths and put an end to suffering is to neutralize action by eliminating the delusions and passions which vitiate it. Non-action alone leads to the destruction of action (A. II, 232).

It remains to be seen whether it is possible to destroy suffering and, if so, of what this destruction consists. The third Noble Truth answers this question.

*'There exists a Nirvāṇa, an end to suffering'*

The first two Truths are exclusively concerned with the world of becoming. The third Truth is located on a diametrically opposite plane: that of the unconditioned (*asaṃskṛta*), especially Nirvāṇa, devoid of arising, disappearance, duration and change, and avoiding the paths of speech and thought: 'No eye, no tongue, no

thought can perceive the Holy One who is in complete Nirvāṇa' (S. IV, 52–3).

Nirvāṇa is presented to us in the following way:

(i) It is the destruction of desire and the basic passions which are craving, hatred and delusion (A. II, 34; S. IV, 251). The destruction of the passions neutralizes actions and prevents them from yielding any result.

(ii) Nirvāṇa is the disappearance of the five Aggregates and the end of painful rebirth. The Holy One, freed from the Aggregate of form, from the Aggregate of feeling, from the Aggregate of perception, from the Aggregate of volition and from the Aggregate of consciousness, is as profound, immeasurable and unfathomable as the great sea. In him the Aggregates are destroyed, uprooted and unable to generate (S. IV, 378–9). He who has reached complete Nirvāṇa is indefinable. The disappearance of the passions does not prevent the Holy One from continuing his last existence; his Aggregates go on existing for some time longer; this is known as a 'Nirvāṇa with a remainder of conditioning' (*sopadbiṣeṣa*) continued in the present existence (*dr̥ṣṭadharma*). However, after the decease of the Holy One, all his Aggregates, impure and pure, disappear, and the Holy One is no longer to be found anywhere; he has reached complete Nirvāṇa; this is what is called 'Nirvāṇa without a remainder of conditioning' (*nirupadbiṣeṣa*) (It, 38).

(iii) Nirvāṇa is the end of suffering. Remote from becoming, Nirvāṇa marks the end of suffering, but this





*Worn out by age and fatigue the Buddha achieved Final Nirvāṇa at the age of 80, lying between trees – a 10th-century relief from eastern India. His body was cremated and his relics placed in commemorative stupas; one is represented above him.*

final end is not a paradise; it is outside space and time and, in truth, is nowhere to be found: 'There is a sphere which is neither earth, nor water, nor fire, nor air, which is not the sphere of the infinity of space, nor the sphere of the infinity of consciousness, nor the sphere of nothingness, nor the sphere of either perception or non-perception, which is neither this world nor the other world, neither sun nor moon. I deny that it is coming or going, enduring, death or birth. It is only the end of suffering' (*Ud.* 80).

(iv) Nirvāṇa is supreme happiness (*parama sukha*). Secure from birth, disease, old-age-and-death, Nirvāṇa is supreme happiness (*M.* I, 508), but since feeling is absent from it, what causes the bliss of Nirvāṇa is precisely the absence of bliss (*A.* IV, 414).

(v) Nirvāṇa is unconditioned (*asamskṛta*). Free from arising, disappearance, duration and change, Nirvāṇa is an unconditioned thing in direct contrast to the conditioned (*samskṛta*) Aggregates which arise, disappear, endure and change. Early Buddhism accepted the reality of conditioned things and hence deduced the reality of the unconditioned, especially Nirvāṇa – which led to the saying: 'There is an unborn, unarisen, uncreated, unconditioned; if there were no unborn, there would be no release for what is born, arisen, created, conditioned' (*It.* 37).

*'A Path, defined by the Buddha, leads to Nirvāṇa'*

The fourth Noble Truth deals with the Path which leads to the extinction of suffering (*duḥkhanirodhabagāminī pratipad*): it is the destruction of the delusions and passions and brings release from the world of becoming, the world of suffering. It is called the Noble Eightfold Path (*āryāṣṭāṅgamārga*): right view, right resolve, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration (*Vin.* I, 10); but the eight limbs in fact come down to three basic elements: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*) and wisdom (*prajñā*) (*D.* II, 81, 84; *It.* 51). All three are indispensable but the most important is wisdom, by means of which the mind is freed from impurities (*āsrava*).

(i) Morality (*sīla*) consists of conscious and willed abstention from misconduct of body (taking the life of living beings, theft, sexual misconduct), of speech (falsehood, slander, harsh and useless speech), and of mind (covetousness, animosity, wrong views). Its aim is to avoid any action which might harm someone else. The observation of morality increases in value when it is sanctioned by a vow or commitment: it is then called morality of restraint (*samvara-sīla*). Based on the same fundamental principles, it nevertheless varies with different ways of life: the obligations of a monk are stricter than those of a lay person.

(ii) Concentration (*samādhi*) is the fixing of the mind on one point. In practice it is much the same as the absence of distraction (*avikṣepa*) and as mental tranquillity (*śamatha*). Concentration normally involves nine successive stages of meditation; these are well defined in the texts (*D.* II, 156; III, 265, 290; *A.* IV, 410), but too detailed to go into here. At the beginning of their practice the mind still exerts all its natural activity, namely seeking both an object of meditation and a well-thought-out judgment on that object. In the course of the practices the mind gradually frees itself from its various activities and becomes increasingly clear. Finally, it penetrates the ninth and last stage, the contemplation of the destruction of perception and feeling (*samjñāvedayitanirodhasamāpatti*), where the practitioner's passions are destroyed by knowledge and he attains Enlightenment, or, to use the exact expression, Nirvāṇa in this world.

The practice of concentration, eventually completed by insight (*vipaśyanā*), puts the practitioner in possession of six higher spiritual powers called super-knowledges (*abhijñā*), five of them worldly and the sixth transcendental. These are psychic power, the divine eye of immense farsightedness, the penetration of others' thoughts, divine hearing, the remembrance of former existences and, finally, the destruction of the impurities which ensures liberation in this life (*D.* III, 281).

A set of four spiritual practices, called *brahmavihāra*, known and practised at all times by Indian meditators, is particularly recommended although, in the economy of the Path, they appear somewhat ancillary. They consist of the projection of thought filled successively

with goodwill (*maitrī*), compassion (*karuṇā*), altruistic joy (*muditā*) and perfect equanimity (*upekṣā*) in all directions, and enveloping the whole world in these infinite states (D. II, 186; III, 223–4).

(iii) Wisdom (*prajñā*) is the ultimate and main element of the Path. The practice of concentration is not capable of completely purifying the mind; in order to ensure quiescence, peace and Nirvāṇa, wisdom is also necessary. This is not a gnosis of vague and imprecise content, more emotional than intellectual. It is a question of clear and precise vision, embracing the Noble Truths and penetrating in depth the general characteristics of things – impermanence, suffering and the impersonality of phenomena – as well as the peace of Nirvāṇa.

There is a distinction between wisdom arising from teaching, from reflection, and from repeated practice (*bhāvanā*). This last, if it is pure (*anāsrava*), i.e. completely free from delusions and wrong views, sees in depth the true nature of things (*dharmatā*) – which is, according to early Buddhism, nothing more or less than Dependent Origination – severs the final bonds with the world and ensures ‘deliverance of mind through wisdom’ (*cetovimukti* and *prajñāvimukti*). The Noble One whom this Enlightens becomes aware of his deliverance and declares: ‘I have realized the Noble Truths; ended are rebirths; I have lived the pure life; what had to be done has been done; henceforth there will be no further rebirth for me.’

### The Sangha

#### *The formation of the Sangha during the Buddha's lifetime*

The Buddhist Sangha is composed of four assemblies: monks (*bhikkhū*), nuns (*bhikkhunī*), laymen (*upāsaka*) and laywomen (*upāsikā*). The religious are distinguished from the laity by their dress, way of life and particularly by their spiritual faculties. All are children of the Buddha and aspire to deliverance. The religious will reach this quickly by using the Path to Nirvāṇa; the laity, more slowly, by committing themselves at first to the Path to the Heavens. A close collaboration between these various groups is indispensable to the smooth running of the community: ‘They pay you great service, O monks, the Brahmins and householders who give you clothing, alms, seats, couches and medicines. You also pay them great service when you teach them the Good Doctrine and the pure life (*brahmacarya*). Thus it is through your mutual help that the religious life, which causes the crossing over beyond rebirth and puts an end to suffering, can be practised. Each relying on the other, householders and homeless cause the Good Doctrine to prosper. The latter are protected from need, since they receive clothing and the rest; the former, having practised the Doctrine in this world, the Path which leads to good forms of rebirth, delight in the world of the gods possessed of the blisses’ (It. 111).

The superiority of the religious state over that of the laity has never been contested, but there is a striking

contrast between the passive virtues of renunciation and detachment practised by the monks and the active virtues of generosity and kindness practised by the laity. Among the latter appeared the tendency to claim rights equal to those of the religious. When it became no longer a question of attaining Nirvāṇa but of acceding to Buddhahood – an ideal adopted by the Mahāyāna – the career of the future Buddhas was open to the laity as well as to the religious. Nevertheless, at the first stage of this career, the adherent leaves the world and becomes a monk in the Tathāgatas’ Order (Tr. V, 2390).

The *Skandhaka*, which is the second part of the *Vinaya*, the book of monastic Discipline, narrates the conversions carried out by the Buddha in Benares, Uruvilvā and Rājagṛha during the weeks that followed his Enlightenment. It was then that the first lay followers and monks appeared. Five years later, nuns were received into the Sangha. Differences between the various recensions of the *Vinaya* that have come down to us can be observed, but all the conversions followed the same format. The Buddhas make use of many means in order to convert beings; Śākyamuni mainly resorted to instruction. The group of five monks who had assisted the future Buddha during his years of austerity and who had later abandoned him were converted during the Discourses at Benares. After the account of the Enlightenment, one of them, Ajñāta Kauṇḍinya, obtained the first fruit of the religious life, that of ‘Stream-Entry’ (*srotaāpatti*) and requested entry into the Order; after the description of the Four Noble Truths, Kauṇḍinya became an *arhat* or Holy One, while his four companions discovered the first fruit of the religious life and asked for ordination; finally, after the Homily on the No-Self, his companions became Holy Ones in turn. Thus there were, including the Buddha, six Holy Ones in the world.

After the Discourses at Benares and in varying circumstances, the number of Holy Ones reached sixty-one. According to Sanskrit sources, Yaśa became a Buddhist layman before becoming a Holy One and entering the Order. Yaśa’s four brothers and his fifty companions asked for and received ordination before reaching holiness, while his mother and wife became the first Buddhist laywomen. Other people who had benefited from the same teachings declared themselves as lay followers: they understood the Noble Truths, but their minds were not yet freed from the impurities.

Except for the group of five monks, conversions took place in the following way. The Buddha instructed the candidate by communicating to him the gradual teaching (*anupūrvīya dharmadeśanā*), the terms of which are fixed and allow of no variety: ‘To the candidate sitting at his side, the Blessed One communicated the gradual teaching, namely, a discourse on giving, a discourse on morality, a discourse on heaven, and explained to him the peril, vanity and depravation of the sense pleasures as well as the advantages there are in renouncing them. When the Blessed One realized that



the candidate's mind was prepared, pliable, free of hindrance, joyful and well disposed, then he taught him in full the excellent doctrinal account of the Blessed Buddhas (of the past), namely, the Four Noble Truths: suffering, its origin, its extinction and the path leading to its extinction.'

Enlightened by these teachings, the candidate understands the Four Noble Truths, penetrates the mechanism of Dependent Origination, and the Eye of the Doctrine (*dharmacakṣus*) without dust or stain arises in him, which means in scholastic terms that he obtains the first fruit of the religious life, Entry into the Stream of Nirvāṇa (*srotaāpattiṭṭhala*). This result is rendered by the following formula: 'Just as clean fabric, without any black stain, can exactly hold the dye, so in this candidate, still in the same position, arose the Eye of the Doctrine without dust or stain, and he knew that everything that is subject to arising is also subject to perishing.'

The candidate who is possessed of the Eye of the Doctrine can either become a lay follower (*upāsaka*) or request ordination (*upasampad*). The candidate who professes to becoming a lay follower expresses this in the following way: 'It is wonderful, Lord! As if what had fallen has been straightened, as if what was hidden has been found, as if the path was shown to one who had strayed or as if a lamp was placed in darkness for those who have eyes to see the visible, so the Doctrine has been explained by the Blessed One in many a way. I myself take refuge in the Buddha, in the Dharma and in the Sangha of monks. May the Blessed One consider me as a lay follower from this day for as long as my life may last.' Such a commitment was entirely unilateral and was accepted by the Buddha in silence.

The lay man or woman is expected to accept five rules (*sikṣāpada*) of moral restraint (*pañcasiṭa*); although in translation they are often called 'the Five Precepts', they have the form of undertakings. He says: 'I undertake to refrain from taking life', and makes similar promises regarding stealing, unchastity (defined according to the situation), lying and taking intoxicants which make for carelessness (and hence for breaking the other four rules). On certain holy days pious laymen traditionally undertake five further abstentions: from all sexual activity, from eating after midday, from the use of perfumes, unguents and personal adornment, from seeing public entertainments, from the use of grand beds; their vow is known as 'the Eight Precepts' (*aṣṭāṅga siṭa*).

The ceremony of admission into the Sangha is quite different if, instead of becoming a lay follower, the candidate requests entry into the Order. During the lifetime of the Buddha, it was obtained in a rather informal way. 'The candidate, having seen the Doctrine, acquired the Doctrine, known the Doctrine and been immersed in the Doctrine, having cast out doubt, dispelled uncertainty and having, without the help of anyone else, placed his confidence in the teaching of the master', requests ordination in the

following terms: 'May I, O Lord, in the presence of the Blessed One, receive the 'Going forth' from home (*pravrajyā*), receive ordination (*upasampad*). May I, in the presence of the Blessed One, practise the pure conduct (*brahmacarya*).' To the request put to him the Buddha answered with a summons: 'Come, O monk; the Doctrine has been well expounded; practise pure conduct in order to put a definitive end to suffering.'

Often the Buddha had no sooner uttered those words than the candidate miraculously found himself shaved, dressed in the religious cloak and holding in his hands the begging bowl and water pot, with a week's growth of hair and beard – as though he were a monk who had been ordained for a hundred years (see *Divy.* 37).

The summons 'Come, monk', which can be addressed to one man or several, is one of the ten kinds of ordination in use in Buddhism. It does not necessarily culminate in a fruit of the religious life, but it marks the beginning of pure conduct and brings about monkhood.

The monk still has to practise and exert himself before attaining holiness (*arhatship*) which constitutes the final fruit. It is only after right thought, eventually provoked by further instruction from the Buddha, that 'his mind is, through detachment [from the world], freed from impurities'.

'After his ordination, the monk remains alone and solitary, diligent, vigorous and master of himself. And soon, in this very life, through his own comprehension and realization, he attains the supreme culmination of pure conduct, for which the sons of good family rightly pass from life at home to homelessness, and dwells there. He acknowledges: "I have realized the Noble Truths; ended are rebirths; I have lived the pure life; what had to be done has been done; henceforth there will be no further rebirth for me."'

The conversion of the first sixty Holy Ones was extremely quick. They passed directly from the first to the fourth and culminating fruit of the religious life. The teaching of the Noble Truths gave them possession of the Eye of the Doctrine without dust or stain; they requested and obtained ordination; then, following a further discourse from the Buddha, their minds were freed from impurities and they attained holiness. The Buddha's career was longer and more complicated, because he had to discover the Truths without the help of a master and he had a much more perfect understanding of them: the Enlightenment of the *arhats* penetrates the general characteristics of things, but the Supreme Enlightenment of the Buddha includes an omniscience which extends as far as the particular characteristics of all phenomena.

The first sixty *arhats* did not attach themselves to the master's person and did not follow him on his peregrinations. Later, during his journeys in the middle Ganges basin, the Buddha was regularly accompanied by a Sangha of 1,250 monks made up of the three Kāśyapa brothers, 1,000 former matted-haired ascetics (*jaṭila*) and the 250 wandering mendicants (*parivrajaka*) led by

Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. The Buddha, who abhorred miracles, nevertheless converted these matted-haired ascetics by a long series of wonders. Once possessed of the first fruit of the religious life, they requested ordination and this was conferred on them with the formula, 'Come, monk'. Some time after, in Gayāśīrṣa, they heard the Fire Discourse, and their minds were freed from impurities.

Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana had from a tender age been in search of the 'Immortal'. They first attended the school of the sectarian master Sañjaya, who had an entourage of five hundred wandering mendicants. One day, in the streets of Rājagṛha, Śāriputra met Aśvajit, one of the first five monks converted in Benares, and heard from his lips the famous stanza which summarizes the Buddhist Doctrine in four lines: 'Of all phenomena arising from a cause, the Tathāgata has told the cause; he also revealed their extinction; he was the great Ascetic.' Śāriputra immediately acquired the Eye of the Doctrine without dust or stain. He told the stanza to Maudgalyāyana, who in turn was possessed of the first fruit of the Path. Taking with them 250 of Sañjaya's wandering mendicants, the two friends went to the Buddha. At their own request, they received ordination with the 'Come, monk' formula. At that very instant the minds of the 250 wandering mendicants were freed from impurities and they became *arhats*. The two who had led them to the Buddha took longer to reach the same result: Maudgalyāyana became a Holy One seven days after his ordination and Śāriputra another week later. Śāriputra became 'first of those of penetrating intelligence', Maudgalyāyana 'first of those who have magic powers', and together they were known as the 'foremost pair' (*agra yuga*) of the Buddha's disciples, his 'right hand' and 'left hand' disciple respectively.

Five years after the Buddha's Enlightenment, his aunt Mahā Prajāpatī Gautamī accompanied by five hundred Śākyan women went to the Lord in Vaiśālī and requested permission for women to leave home for the homeless life of the Doctrine and Discipline so well expounded by the Tathāgata. The Buddha refused three times. Gautamī and her companions cut off their hair, dressed in the yellow robes and went to the Buddha. Ananda, the Buddha's cousin and attendant monk, interceded for them, but three times more the Buddha refused his permission. Later on, he conceded that if a woman were to accept eight strict rules (*gurudharma*) this would replace ordination (*upasampad*) for her, and she could obtain the four fruits of the religious life. Gautamī and the five hundred Śākyan women joyfully accepted this proposition and were thus ordained (*Vin.* II, 253-6; *A.* IV, 274-7).

However, this new status did not immediately confer the fruits of the religious life on them. It was only later, when they heard the religious instruction communicated twice to them by the monk Nandaka, that they had access to these attainments; even the favoured nun only achieved the first, Stream-Entry (*M.* III, 277).

#### *The career of the monks and nuns after the Buddha's decease*

The Order is open to all those who are free to dispose of themselves and who do not suffer from the impediments of crime or contagious disease. No account is taken of caste distinctions, although Śākyamuni preferred to recruit his monks from among 'noble young people who leave home to lead a life of wandering' (*Vin.* I, 9). The obligations taken on by the monk do not commit him for ever; he is not forbidden to leave the Order and return to lay life (*Vin.* III, 23-7).

Entry into the Order is made through two distinct ceremonies, which were clearly differentiated soon after the Buddha's decease: 'Going Forth' (*pravrajyā*) and ordination (*upasampad*). Nowadays these are sometimes referred to in English as lower and higher ordination respectively. The candidate cannot be admitted to the 'Going Forth' before the age of eight. He acquires two patrons, a preceptor (*upādhyāya*) and a master (*ācārya*), whose companion (*sārdhavihārin*) and pupil (*antevāsin*) respectively he will become. Having put on the yellow robe and having had his hair and beard cut off, he prostrates himself in front of the preceptor and announces three times that he takes refuge in the Buddha, the Doctrine and the community of monks. After this purely unilateral action, the master teaches him the ten rules (*daśa śikṣāpada*). These are practically the same as the Eight Precepts undertaken by pious Buddhists on holy days, mentioned above (see p. 54); the only difference is that the novice also forswears accepting gold or silver. After 'Going Forth', the candidate is still only a novice (*śrāmaṇera*); he only becomes a regular member of the community, a monk, after higher ordination (*upasampad*), which cannot be conferred on him until he is twenty.

Ordination is fixed down to the smallest detail by the ritual texts called *karmavācānā*. It is conferred by a chapter of at least ten monks. Supplied with a begging bowl and three robes, the supplicant requests ordination three times. The celebrant ensures that he is free of impediments and enquires for his name, his age and his preceptor. Then the ordination proper follows: this is an ecclesiastical act in which the 'motion' is fourfold (*jñāpticaturthakarman*). It in fact consists of a motion (*jñāpti*) followed by three propositions (*karmavācānā*) concerning the admission of the motion by the chapter.

First, the motion: the celebrant asks the chapter: 'May the community hear me: so-and-so, here present, desires, as the pupil of the venerable so-and-so, to receive ordination. If this pleases the community, may it confer ordination: such is the motion.' Then follow the three propositions; the celebrant continues: 'May the community hear me: so-and-so, here present, desires, as the pupil of the venerable so-and-so, to receive ordination. The community confers ordination on so-and-so, with so-and-so as preceptor. He who is of the opinion that ordination should be conferred ..., may he remain silent. He who is of the contrary opinion, may he speak.' This proposition is repeated



The monk's possessions –  
two leaves from a Tibetan series of blockprints now in Japan. The  
upper leaf is devoted to the various water-strainers used by monks to  
prevent them from inadvertently killing insects, and flasks containing

water to rinse their mouths after meals. The lower leaf shows, on the  
left, a mnemonic diagram of the months and seasons and, on the  
right, the various shoes and boots allowed and forbidden to monks.

three times. After the third proposition, if the chapter remains silent, the ordination is accepted and the celebrant declares: 'So-and-so has received ordination from the community with so-and-so as preceptor. The community is of this opinion, that is why it remains silent: it is thus that I hear it' (*Vin. I*, 22, 56, 95).

After which, in order to determine the new monk's rank, the day and hour of his ordination are noted. He is informed of the four rules of monastic austerity (*niśraya*) which he may observe in his outward life, and he is told of the four great prohibitions (*akaraṇīya*) the violation of which would in itself exclude him from the community: sexual intercourse, theft, murder, and false or self-interested usurpation of the spiritual perfections.

The career of the nun is closely modelled on that of the monk. However, before being accepted for ordination, girls aged under twenty and women with more than twelve years of married life are subjected to a probationary stage which lasts for two years. During that period the female probationer (*śikṣamāṇā*) must observe six rules which correspond to the first six of the novice's rules: to abstain from murder, theft, impurity (i.e. sexual activity), falsehood, intoxicants, and meals outside the right time (*Vin. IV*, 319–23).

At the time of her ordination, the future nun, supplied with a begging bowl and the fivefold robe, presents herself, with her preceptress (*upādhyāyikā*) and instructress (*ācārīṇī*), first before the chapter of nuns and then before the chapter of monks, and receives ordination from this twofold assembly. Eight strict canonical provisions place the nun in complete dependence on the monks. The main ones are that she cannot go into retreat where there is no monk; that every fortnight she must go to the community of

monks and receive instruction, but that she herself can neither instruct a monk nor admonish him; that the ceremonies of ordination, of the end of the retreat and of confession are repeated before the community of monks (*Vin. II*, 271–2).

The collection of the detailed regulations for the conduct of the fully ordained monk and nun is called the *Prātimokṣa*. The monks' code consists of more than 220 rules which are arranged in categories according to the penalty prescribed, in decreasing order of gravity. The first four offences, which are so grave that they entail automatic dismissal from the Order, have already been mentioned. The discipline to which the nun is subjected is stricter than that of the monks. Her regulations consist in principle of five hundred articles, double those of the monks, but in practice their numbers vary between 290 and 355.

#### Equipment and life of the monks

The Buddhist Sangha is a mendicant order. The monk renounces all possessions, cannot practise any lucrative career, or receive gold or silver. He expects lay generosity to provide the supplies necessary for his subsistence: clothing, food, shelter and medicines.

The monk has the use of three robes (*tricīvara*): an outer garment (*uttarāsaṅga*), an under garment (*antara-vāsaka*) and a cloak (*saṃghātī*) (*Vin. I*, 94, 289); in addition to these, the nun also wears a belt (*saṃkaksika*) and a skirt (*kuṣūlaka*) (*Vin. II*, 272). These clothes are yellow or reddish (*kāśāya*) in colour. The monk is permitted to wear clothing given by the laity or made of rags which he has collected. Shoes are considered a luxury, but the use of fans is allowed. The monk's equipment also includes a begging bowl, a belt, a razor,

a needle, a strainer, a staff and a tooth-pick; with his robes, these seven items constitute the Eight Requisites (*aṣṭa pariṣkāra*).

The monk lives on the food which he begs daily during his morning alms-round. In silence and with lowered eyes, he goes from house to house and places in his bowl the food which is held out to him, usually balls of rice. Towards midday, his meal time, he withdraws in solitude and eats his food: bread, rice, with water to drink. The use of intoxicant drinks is strictly forbidden; that of flesh or fish is only permitted if the monk has not seen, heard or suspected that the animal was killed on his behalf (*Vin.* I, 238). Ghee (clarified butter), butter, oil, honey and sugar are reserved for the sick and can be taken as medicine (*Vin.* I, 199). A meal eaten at the wrong time, that is, between midday and the morning of the following day, entails a penance. Monks are permitted to accept invitations and have their meal in the homes of the laity.

As to lodgings (*śayanāśana*), the monks have no fixed residence: some live in the open air in mountains and forests, sheltering under a tree; others, more numerous, set up their residence, *vihāra*, near a village or town: a hut of leaves (*parṇaśālā*), a tower (*prāsāda*), a house made of stone (*harmya*) or a cave (*guhā*). In principle the *vihāra* only houses a single monk. *Vihāras* can be grouped in lesser or greater numbers and can shelter some tens of monks. When the complex takes on importance, it is called a convent or monastery (*saṃghārāma*) and may be built of stone, bricks or wood.

During the three or four months of the rainy season, usually from the full moon of the month of Aṣāḍha (June–July) to the full moon of the month of Kārttika (October–November), the Buddhist monk, like the adherents of other non-Brahminical sects of the time, is compelled to go into retreat (*varṣopanāyikā*) and remain in a set place (*Vin.* I, 137). At the end of the retreat, he can continue his wanderings, but is not compelled to do so. Monastic life must have been organized early on, since the buildings put at the disposal of the community by kings and wealthy merchants had to be administered all year round. Today every monastery of any importance has its own officers in charge of food and drink and its own gardener; other monks are in charge of the storerooms, wardrobe, water supplies, begging bowls, voting tickets (*śalākā*), etc.; a superintendent is in charge of the novices.

The daily life of the monk is regulated in every detail. The monk rises very early and devotes himself to meditation. At the appropriate time, he dresses to go out, takes his wooden bowl in his hands and goes to the nearest village to beg for his food. Having returned to the monastery, he washes his feet and, a little before noon, eats his meal. Then he settles on the threshold of his cell and gives instruction to his spiritual sons. When this is over, he withdraws in seclusion, most often to the foot of a tree, there to pass the hot hours of the day in meditation or semi-somnolence. Sunset signals the hour for the public audience, open to all comers, to

which flock sympathizers as well as the merely curious. The darkness of the night brings calm to the monastery once again. The monk may take his bath, then again he receives his disciples and engages in edifying conversation with them which continues well into the first watch of the night.

Twice a month, on the days of the full and of the new moons, the monks who live in the same parish, as well as visiting monks, are obliged to assemble and together celebrate the *poṣadha*, Observance Day – a day of fasting and particularly strict respect of the observances. The Buddhists borrowed this custom from other sects. Each alternate celebration of the *poṣadha* concludes with a public confession between monks. The monks take their places on low seats which have been reserved for them in the assembly area. The senior monk chants a preliminary formula, and invites his brethren to acknowledge their misdeeds; he questions the monks and asks them three times if they are pure of such misdeeds. If everyone remains silent, he proclaims: ‘Pure of these misdeeds are the Venerable Ones, that is why they keep silent; thus have I heard it.’ Anyone guilty who remains silent would be perpetrating a voluntary falsehood, and would violate his solemn commitments.

Some festivities break the monotony of the days. They vary according to the region. However, a festivity celebrated by all the communities is that of *pravāraṇā*, which marks the end of the rainy season and the conclusion of the retreat. This is the occasion for offering gifts to the monks, inviting them to a meal and organizing processions. Then follows the *kāṭhina* festival during which the laity distribute raw cotton cloth (*kāṭhina*) to the members of the community: the monks immediately make clothing out of this which they dye yellow or reddish.

#### *The ideal of the monk*

The ruling which imprisons the monk in a network of detailed prescriptions tends to make him a fully self-denying person: gentle and inoffensive, poor and humble, continent and perfectly trained.

He cannot take the life of any living being, and refuses to use water in which there might be the tiniest creature. Being unable to practise any lucrative profession, he depends on the generosity of the laity for his food and clothing. Nevertheless, he can accept no gold or silver from them and, if he does touch a piece of jewellery or some precious object, he can only do so to return it to its owner.

It is in this spirit that the *prātimokṣa*, the disciplinary code, forbids the monk to be alone with a woman, to share her roof, to walk in her company, to take her hand, to tease her, or even to exchange more than five or six sentences with her. The monk cannot accept food or clothing from a nun who is not related to him. He should, in all circumstances, adopt a correct, humble and vigilant attitude.

However, the obligations imposed on the monk, the

burdens with which he is entrusted, must never be so heavy and absorbing as to deprive him of the faculty of thought and turn him into a mere machine. Each preserves his own personality and aims towards the supreme goal according to the method of his choice. He can, like Muṣṣila, apply himself to the understanding of phenomena (*dharmā-pravicaya*) or, like Nārada, devote himself to the ascetic and meditative disciplines of yoga.

It is possible that the exclusive search for personal holiness is not always conducive to giving the monk a charitable heart, making him benevolent towards his brothers and devoted to the wretched. Nevertheless, in the mass of disciplinary prescriptions an article with a truly human ring can be discerned here and there. One day Śākyamuni found a monk who was suffering from an internal disorder, lying in his own urine and excrement. Since he was no longer of any use, his colleagues took no further care of him. The Buddha washed him with his own hands, changed his bedding and placed him on his bed. Then, addressing the monks, he said: 'O monks, you no longer have a father or mother to take care of you; if you do not take care of each other, who will? Whoever wishes to take care of me, should take care of the sick' (*Vin.* I, 301-2).

Nevertheless, for anyone who wishes to eliminate desire down to its root, brotherly charity is itself not without danger. It is up to each one to work towards his own holiness without being occupied or preoccupied with his neighbour. It is not by any means through love for his brothers that the monk finds his joy and happiness, but in the observance of his vows and rules, in study, meditation and the penetration of the Buddhist truths.

Generally, the monk leaves to the laity the practice of active virtues, which are just advantageous enough to ensure wealth and long life during future rebirths. Personally, he confines himself to the passive virtues of renunciation and imperturbability which alone lead him to holiness in this world and, in the other world, to the destruction of suffering, to the end of *samsāra*, and to Nirvāṇa.

#### List of abbreviations

Unless otherwise indicated, references are to volume and page of the original Pali and Sanskrit texts of the scriptures.

- A. *Anguttara-Nikāya* ed. R. Morris and E. Hardy, 5 vols, London 1885-1900  
 CPS. E. Waldschmidt *Das Catuspariṣatsūtra* 3 vols, Berlin 1952-62  
 D. *Dīgha-Nikāya* ed. T. W. Rhys Davids and J. E. Carpenter, 3 vols, London 1890-1911  
 Divy. *Divyāvadāna* ed. E. B. Cowell and R. A. Neill, Cambridge 1886  
 It. *Itivuttaka* ed. E. Windisch, London 1889  
 M. *Majjhima-Nikāya* ed. V. Trenckner and R. Chalmers, 3 vols, London 1888-99

#### The absence of an authority

Such were the Holy Ones whom the Buddha had trained when he deceased. We should add, since it was to affect the whole history of Buddhism, that he left them without a master or hierarchy. He believed that man cannot constitute a refuge for man, that no human authority can be usefully exerted over minds, and that adherence to the Doctrine should be exclusively based on personal reasoning, on what one has oneself acknowledged, seen and grasped.

In the Buddhist monasteries, particular duties were entrusted to the monks capable of fulfilling them, but this conferred no authority on them over their colleagues. The only precedence allowed was that of seniority calculated from the date of ordination.

If the Buddha refused to establish a functional hierarchy in the monasteries, still less did he intend to give the whole community a spiritual leader. Seeing him aged, his cousin Devadatta offered to replace him as head of the Sangha: 'Lord,' he said, 'attend calmly, then, to the delightful meditation of the Doctrine and entrust the congregation to my keeping; I will care for it.' Śākyamuni rejected this self-interested offer: 'I would not even entrust the congregation to Śāriputra and Maudgalyāyana. Even less to you, Devadatta, who are of no account and so contemptible' (*Vin.* II, 188).

Shortly before his master's decease, gentle Ānanda expressed the hope that the Blessed One would not leave this world before having given his instructions to the community and having designated a successor. The Buddha answered him in substance: 'What does the community expect of me, O Ānanda? Never having wished to direct it or subject it to my teachings, I have no such instructions for the Sangha. I am reaching my end. After my decease, may each of you be your own island, your own refuge; have no other refuge. Acting in this way you will set yourselves on the summit of the Immortal' (*D.* II, 100).

Abandoned by their master, the disciples had to continue the work by themselves and devote the attention they had paid to the Buddha to the Doctrine alone.

- NidSa. C. Tripathi *Fünfundzwanzig Sūtras des Nidāna-samyukta* Berlin 1962  
 S. *Samyutta-Nikāya* ed. L. Feer, 5 vols, London 1884-98  
 Sanghabh. *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Sanghabhedavastu* ed. R. Gnoli, 2 vols, Rome 1977-8  
 Sn. *Suttanipāta* ed. D. Andersen and H. Smith, London 1913  
 Tr. E. Lamotte *Le traité de la grande vertu de sagesse de Nāgārjuna* 5 vols, Louvain 1944-80  
 Ud. *Udāna* ed. P. Sternthal, London 1885  
 Vin. *Vinayapīṭaka* ed. H. Oldenberg, 5 vols, London 1879-83